DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 317 JC 910 108

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TITLE Who's Prepared for College? Results of a Five Year Study of Recent High School Graduates Taking Miami-Dade's Basic Skills Placement Tests. Research Report No. 90-04R.
INSTITUTION Miami-Dade Community Coll., Fla. Office of Institutional Research.
PUB DATE Feb 90
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills; *College Bound Students; *College Freshmen; College Preparation; Community Colleges; Comparative Analysis; High School Graduates; High Schools; *Minimum Competency Testing; Outcomes of Education; Private Schools; Public Schools; Standardized Tests; Student Placement; *Test Score Decline; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS Dade County Public Schools FL; Miami Dade Community College FL

ABSTRACT

A recent study of Dade County Public School (DCPS) graduates attending Miami-Dade Community College (M-DCC) revealed that 64% of those who graduated high school in 1989 had failed one or more of the basic skills sub-tests of the Florida Multiple Assessment Programs and Services test (FL-MAPS). Another study was conducted in 1989 to determine the percentage of recent high school graduates with basic skills deficiencies as measured FL-MAPS and all other placement tests, to compare the placement test performance of public and private school students over time, and to assess the performance of students who received the General Equivalency Diploma (GED). The 1989 study focused on students who enrolled at M-DCC in fall 1989 and had graduated from high school between September 1988 and August 1989. For 95% of the study population, test scores were available on at least one of the following: the Scholastic Aptitude Test; the American College Testing program test; the English Placement Test; and the FL-MAPS. Study highlights include the following: (1) DCPS graduates experienced a 58% failure rate as compared to 44% of Dade County private school graduates; (2) students who did not graduate from a Dade County public or private school, including GED recipients and foreign students, experienced a 70% failure rate; (3) pass rates were similar for out-of-state high school graduates and DCPS graduates; and (4) including scores from all available test instruments reduced the overall test failure rate of recent high school graduates attending M-DCC from 64% just using the F-MAPS to 58%. Data tables are included. (GFW)

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RESULTS OF A FIVE YEAR STUDY OF
RECENT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
TAKING MIAMI-DADE'S
BASIC SKILLS PLACEMENT TESTS

Research Report No. 90-04R

February 1990

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Miami-Dade Community College

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Who's Prepared For College?
Results of a Five Year Study of Recent High School
Graduates Taking Miami-Dade's Basic Skills Placement Tests

Recently, the newspapers once again reported that the nation's youth are lacking in adequate levels of reading and writing skills. Education Secretary Lauro F. Cavazos termed the skills levels "dreadfully inadequate" (Miami Herald, 1/10/90). In international comparisons, United States students fall far behind their counterparts in many other industrialized countries on mathematics and science (I.C. No. 89-08C).

The American public greets these findings with concern and horror. A recent poll found that voters ranked Education as one of the top issues to be addressed. As a reaction to these concerns, politicians have tried to legislate improvement. In Florida, legislative mandates have resulted in new competency tests, reduced class size in some courses, and a more rigorous curriculum, to name a few changes at the high school level. In higher education, Floridians gained the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST), a test implemented for college sophomores with a graduated series of cut-scores based on the assumption that each graduating class of high school seniors would be better prepared for college.

The rhetoric certainly has been present. So has legislative desire. But have the rhetoric and the legislation translated into real change? Are our students graduating high school better prepared for work and/or further schooling? Repeated testings of critical skills since 1971 using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that skills have not improved and even show signs of decline during the 1990's (Miami Herald, 1/10/90).

At Miami-Dade, findings have been similar. The most recent report on "Basic Skills Assessment Results of Dade County High School Graduates at Miami-Dade Community College" (R.R. No. 89-14R) found that 64% of those who graduated from Dade County Public Schools (DCPS) within the last year failed one or more basic skills subtests. This figure was similar to those reported for the previous nine years.

This finding is based, however, only on those students who were first-time-in-college and were tested using the FL-MAPS. This figure excludes any students who had previous college work, such as dual enrollees or students who first enrolled during the spring or summer, or who tested using other instruments. In the past several years, it has become increasingly common for students to present SAT scores. In addition, previous reports have not addressed the performance of private school graduates or those who obtained a diploma from anywhere other than a Dade County public school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how many recent high school graduates fail one or more M-DCC basic skills tests when all possible instruments are included, and to compare the performance of public school students with others over time. Questions to be addressed included:

1. When results of all placement tests (FL-MAPS, SAT, ACT, or EPT) are included, what percentage of students who graduated from high school within the past year need help with basic skills?

2. Has the percentage of students who fail one or more areas of basic skills changed over the past five years?

3. How do students who graduate from public and private schools compare on their basic skills performance? How well do students perform who received General Equivalency Diplomas? Who went to foreign high schools?

Methodology

Students were included in the analysis who enrolled at Miami-Dade for the Fall 1989 semester and who had high school diploma dates which fell between September, 1988, and August, 1989. It did not matter what the student's enrollment code was for the Fall 1989 semester; all were included if their graduation dates indicated a recent graduate.

Each student's scores from the Test Master Record (TMR) were read, including FL-MAPS, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), American College Testing (ACT), and English Placement Test (EPT). Students' most recent scores prior to the Fall Term were used in the analysis. If students had more than one set of test scores, results from the FL-MAPS test were used first, followed by the SAT, ACT, then EPT. Over 95% of the students showed at least one set of test scores.

Results

Broadening the pool of students and number of tests included in the analysis resulted in a slightly lower percentage of high school graduates needing basic skills help. About 59% of the students who graduated from high school in the past year and attended M-DCC failed one or more subtests. This figure has remained stable over the past five years.

A strong majority (70%) of recent graduates came from the Dade County Public Schools. This DCPS group had about a 58% failure rate. As shown by Table 1, students from Dade County's private schools outperformed public schools students with about 44% of this group failing one or more tests. Students from outside Dade County, including GED recipients and foreign graduates, showed a much higher failure rate--about 70% for 1989 graduates.

Table 2 shows the results for individual schools in the Dade County Public Schools system with at least 10 graduates at Miami-Dade. Schools in the southern end of the county generally showed fewer failers than those in the northern half.

Table 3 provides a better look at the performance of private schools. Note that the only two Dade County private schools who enrolled more than 100 students were Christopher Columbus High School and Saint Brendan's. Both of these schools had failure rates below 40% compared to the DCPS rates of almost 60%.

Table 4 includes results of all students who graduated outside Dade County public or private schools. About two-thirds of the foreign graduates needed help in one or more areas of basic skills, a finding that was not very surprising because of lack of familiarity with the English language. What was more surprising was the finding that about 75% of students who obtained a Florida General Equivalency Diploma (GED) were underprepared. Students who obtained their diplomas at other U.S. high schools, however, had passing rates that were similar to DCPS graduates.

Summary and Conclusions

Despite efforts, the percentage of students entering Miami-Dade who need basic skills help has not changed over the past five years. For the public schools, about 58% of recent graduates are weak in one or more areas. Private school graduates fare better with about a 44% failure rate. About two-thirds of foreign graduates need help compared to 75% of students completing the Florida GED.

The figures for the public schools are somewhat lower than previously reported due to the inclusion of a broader group of students and more tests besides the FL-MAPS. The previous estimate of 64% should be replaced by the current and more accurate 58% figure.

Before drawing far-reaching conclusions, it must be remembered that students who enroll at Miami-Dade are not representative of all recent DCPS graduates. Nor can we be sure that the type of student M-DCC receives has not shifted over the years (it is possible that DCPS is turning out more qualified students but that M-DCC is receiving fewer of them). However, since the numbers remain stable, it is apparent that fewer than half of the students Miami-Dade receives from the public school system are prepared to begin college level work, even though they have just graduated from high school.

Table 1

Percent of Last Year's High School Graduates
Failing at Least One M-DCC Placement Subtest
By Type of Diploma

	Public School Enrollees				Private School Enrollees				Others				Total			
	Tested		Failed		Tested		Failed		Tested		Failed		Tested		Failed	
Year	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1985	3,675	98.7	2,140	58.5	671	92.4	298	44.4	1,033	86.9	776	75.1	5,379	95.4	3,214	59.8
1986	3,577	98.6	2,075	58.0	714	97.0	315	44.1	1,165	90.4	893	76.7	5,456	96.5	3,283	60.2
1987	3,840	98.7	2,107	54.9	725	99.5	337	46.5	1,370	92.5	1,032	75.3	5,935	97.3	3,476	58.6
1988	4,244	97.7	2,418	57.0	705	98.2	336	47.7	1,151	91.3	791	68.7	6,100	96.5	3,545	58.1
1989	4,463	97.4	2,613	58.5	736	97.6	322	43.8	1,219	93.1	857	70.3	6,418	96.6	3,792	59.1

Table 2

Performance of Last Year's Public High School Graduates on
Miami-Dade Basic Skills Tests

School	Fall 1985			Fall 1986			Fall 1987			Fall 1988			Fall 1989		
	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More
North County Area															
American	87	86	62.8	74	70	78.8	109	108	53.7	152	152	59.2	145	144	61.1
Carol City	45	45	73.3	64	64	79.7	61	60	75.0	52	50	76.0	67	65	75.6
Hialeah-Miami-Lake	173	171	66.1	189	185	54.6	208	207	57.5	225	223	60.5	217	210	63.8
Miami Beach	101	98	64.3	108	107	64.5	110	108	59.3	139	132	59.8	136	128	60.2
Norland	88	86	68.6	98	97	60.8	110	109	67.0	91	86	60.5	122	122	67.2
North Miami	118	114	62.3	141	141	70.2	161	154	59.7	170	168	60.1	201	198	63.1
North Miami Beach	77	75	64.0	101	98	67.3	84	81	69.1	111	95	64.2	117	115	67.8
North Central County Area															
Central	62	61	75.4	102	101	85.1	73	72	83.3	81	80	77.5	83	83	77.1
Edison	83	82	92.7	73	71	83.1	96	95	78.9	78	75	78.7	83	79	81.0
Hialeah	293	289	62.6	219	214	69.2	229	229	65.5	298	292	58.6	283	280	64.3
Jackson	76	74	86.5	88	85	75.3	80	79	87.3	100	97	77.3	118	114	86.0
Miami Springs	155	151	67.5	148	145	66.9	148	146	69.9	183	180	58.9	132	130	61.5
New World School	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	18	9	66.7	20	13	30.8
Northwestern	51	48	93.8	42	40	97.5	50	46	89.1	64	64	90.6	44	42	92.9
South Central County Area															
Coral Gables	221	213	62.9	226	222	62.6	198	195	48.2	228	225	58.2	244	230	49.6
Coral Park	283	278	55.4	282	280	47.5	310	307	53.4	386	385	59.0	368	366	56.3
Miami Senior	260	255	59.6	210	209	66.5	246	243	60.5	256	252	67.9	270	257	68.9
South Miami	261	259	56.8	162	161	52.2	179	178	45.5	181	181	59.1	226	225	57.3
Sunset	261	257	42.0	273	272	44.5	365	364	42.0	376	372	43.0	436	425	47.3
South County Area															
Homestead	74	74	47.3	72	69	46.4	101	101	43.6	71	69	55.1	102	99	52.5
Killian	237	232	45.7	264	261	38.3	243	238	35.3	274	271	40.6	284	271	43.9
Palmetto	172	166	43.4	158	155	45.8	193	189	48.1	175	173	45.7	188	178	45.5
Southridge	168	168	46.4	159	157	47.8	169	166	46.4	216	212	52.4	228	224	54.0
South Dade	81	81	59.3	95	93	50.5	89	88	52.3	114	113	48.7	111	108	55.6
Southwest	298	294	51.4	281	280	54.6	279	277	44.0	306	306	44.4	359	357	53.5
Percentage of Total Failing at Least One Subtest:		58.5			58.0			54.9			57.0			58.5	

Table 3

Performance of Last Year's Private High School Graduates on
Miami-Dade Basic Skills Tests

School	Fall 1985			Fall 1986			Fall 1987			Fall 1988			Fall 1989		
	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More
Archbishop Curley	44	42	59.5	47	47	59.6	36	35	60.0	24	24	37.5	30	30	33.3
Florida Christian School	16	16	43.8	17	17	58.8	11	11	45.5	12	12	41.7	24	23	43.5
Christopher Columbus HS	108	107	38.3	103	102	30.4	129	129	45.7	127	127	42.5	123	120	39.2
InterAmerican Military Acad.	31	17	94.1	39	39	82.1	31	31	61.3	17	17	88.2	20	18	88.9
Loyola School	31	29	69.0	30	30	53.3	28	28	50.0	24	24	75.0	24	23	60.9
Belen Jesuit Prep.	23	22	13.6	23	23	13.0	36	36	5.6	31	30	10.0	33	32	9.4
Immaculata La Salle	66	65	67.7	83	82	58.5	71	70	51.4	61	61	45.9	82	81	46.9
Champagnat Catholic	42	27	66.7	38	22	81.8	24	22	54.5	30	28	71.4	29	24	79.2
Progresiva Presbyterian	17	12	58.3	16	15	80.0	14	14	71.4	21	21	71.4	23	22	68.2
Saint Brendan	161	155	25.2	156	156	29.5	145	145	40.0	162	162	40.1	148	147	32.7
Westminster Christian Acad.	15	15	40.0	14	14	28.6	17	17	58.8	19	19	52.6	20	20	55.0
Westwood Christian	15	15	53.3	16	16	75.0	10	10	90.0	24	24	75.0	21	20	75.0
Our Lady of Lourdes Acad.	78	77	24.7	75	74	24.3	89	89	42.7	84	83	36.1	89	89	36.0
Monsignor Edward Pace	79	72	62.5	79	77	48.1	88	88	50.0	82	82	56.1	88	87	50.6
Percentage of Total Failing at Least One Subtest:		44.4			44.1			46.5			47.7			43.8	

Table 4

Performance of Last Year's Other High School Graduates on
Miami-Dade Basic Skills Tests

	Fall 1985			Fall 1986			Fall 1987			Fall 1988			Fall 1989		
School	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More	Enrolled	Tested	Below on One or More
Foreign Graduates	217	196	83.2	210	189	78.8	211	187	66.3	241	218	67.4	228	199	67.8
High School Equivalency (Out of State)	30	25	72.0	25	24	66.7	28	27	81.5	27	23	60.9	22	22	68.2
High School Equivalency (Florida)	617	511	84.0	703	623	83.1	801	737	83.4	513	482	77.4	583	557	75.2
High School Equivalency (Spanish)	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	31	27	100.0	66	55	98.2
Other U.S. High Schools	325	301	55.1	351	329	63.8	441	419	64.7	449	401	54.7	410	386	60.6
Percentage of Students Failing at Least One Subtest:		75.1			76.7			75.3			68.7			70.3	

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